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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI INTERIM GOVERNMENT LIFTS STATE OF EMERGENCY;
ASSESSMENT TEAM SAYS ELECTION CAN BE HELD EARLY 2009 OR
SOONER

REF: SUVA 290

Classified By: CDA Ted Mann per 1.4 (B,D)

Summary

¶11. (C) Interim PM Bainimarama announced May 31 that Fiji's State of Emergency would end, effective June 1. In a meeting with diplomats, Deputy Commander Teleni confirmed that the RFMF would no longer detain or bring individuals to the military barracks for questioning. NGOs and foreign missions (including the Embassy) welcomed the development, noting that they hope this is the first step toward a quick re-establishment of democracy in Fiji. In a report sent to Pacific Island Forum countries June 1, the Forum's election assessment team stated that a parliamentary election in Fiji could be held within the 18-24 month timeframe recommended by the Forum's Eminent Persons Group. End summary.

Public Emergency Regulations Discontinued

¶12. (U) In a speech May 31, interim PM Frank Bainimarama announced that the Public Emergency Regulations (PER) put in place after the December military coup had been discontinued, effective June 1. Bainimarama defended his imposition (and multiple renewals) of the PER, insisting it "had a limited life span, was applied sparingly and...was within the scope of our constitution." He expressed dismay that many in the international community had opposed the PER, stating they "failed to accept and recognize that the people of Fiji were enjoying peace and a virtually crime-free environment as a result of the increased security...Following the removal of the check points, there was an immediate surge in home invasions and burglaries." Nevertheless, said Bainimarama, following a thorough assessment and taking into account the views of Fiji's security agencies, the interim government decided not to extend the regulations.

Reminder of the Public Order Act

¶13. (U) Bainimarama emphasized that any person inciting violence and disobedience of law, inciting racial antagonism, maliciously fabricating or knowingly spreading false reports, or otherwise acting in a matter prejudicial to the peace and good order of Fiji would be investigated by the police and prosecuted under the long-standing Public Order Act. He noted the joint Police/RFMF operations throughout Fiji and indicated these would continue.

Teleni Tells Forum - No More Trips to Barracks;

Military Won't Comment on Qarase's Status

14. (C) Peter Eafeare, the PNG High Commissioner to Fiji, told a group of diplomats June 1 that Deputy RFMF Commander Esela Teleni had informed the Pacific Island Forum-Fiji working group that, in light of the lifting of the State of Emergency, the military would cease taking people up to the army barracks for interrogation. Teleni also said the RFMF would no longer "chase after" individuals involved in the many anti-coup blogs that have sprung up on the Internet.

15. (U) The military has remained mum on how removal of the regulations affects the status of deposed PM Qarase, currently in internal exile on an isolated island in the Lau island group. RFMF spokesperson Leweni told reporters the military has no comment to make at this time. Qarase's lawyer, Tevita Fa, told reporters that he hopes Qarase will be able to travel to Suva by next week, now that the State of Emergency has ended.

NGOs Hope for the Best

16. (U) Several NGOs issued statements welcoming the interim government's decision. Shamima Ali, head of the Fiji Women's Crisis Center, told reporters she hopes the move is the first step toward returning democracy to Fiji. She said that she hopes this action will help stop human rights violations and end the military's practice of detaining dissidents.

French Ambassador - A Good Start;
U.S. Embassy Issues Statement

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17. (C) The French Ambassador to Fiji, Jean-Francois Bouffandeau, told us the decision to end the emergency regulations was a very positive development from the EU's perspective. It would be very difficult, he said, for the interim government to backtrack and reimpose a state of emergency. The next big test, he said, will be how the interim government reacts to the report of the Pacific Island Forum's election assessment team. (Note: the election team's assessment was sent to the Forum late June 1, see paragraph 9 below.) If the IG accepts an election timeframe consistent with that report, some of the EU assistance money previously allocated for Fiji but held up because of the coup should begin to flow once again.

18. (U) In response to inquiries from news organizations in Fiji, the Embassy issued the following statement:
"The U.S. Embassy is encouraged by the decision of the interim government in Fiji to lift the Public Emergency Regulations put in place following the military coup in December. The United States hopes the move is the beginning of a concerted effort to end human rights abuses and quickly return Fiji to democracy, within the timeframe recommended by the Forum's Eminent Persons Group."

PIF Assessment Team Says Elections Can be Held
Within Two Years

19. (C) The team responsible for the technical assessment of the electoral process in Fiji forwarded its report to the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries late June 1. We received a copy from the New Zealand High Commission. The team concluded that "from a technical point of view, a parliamentary election in Fiji could be held in the first quarter of 2009. However, if the (Fiji) Bureau of Statistics has additional resources to allow it to bring forward the release of provisional and final population figures from the census, the election could be held in November 2008." We understand the report will be made public June 7, after the Forum member countries (including Fiji) have had a chance to review it.

Comment: Election Timetable Remains the Key

¶10. (C) Comment: The decision to remove the public emergency regulations is indeed a positive development. Nevertheless, we remain somewhat skeptical that the interim regime will tolerate real dissent or a possible strike action by public sector unions, threatened for the coming weeks. It also remains to be seen how Bainimarama will react to the election timeframe suggested by the PIF election assessment team.

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